

PRO TRAINER

NRHA 

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONAL REINING TRAINERS SUMMER 2023

FROM YOUR CUSTOMER:
BEST SERVICE TIPS

FIND YOUR APPRENTICE

PLUS:

Team-Building Activities

Is It Slander or Negative Feedback?

Summer Marketing Ideas



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PRO TRAINER NEWS

PEOPLE, REPORTS, EVENTS

Roping Benefits Crisis Fund

BY LESLIE BAKER

PHOTOS BY KELSEY KEITHLEY
NORFLEET PHOTOGRAPHY

Some reiners definitely rope, and dozens teamed up to raise funds at Reiners Rope, a dummy-roping contest to benefit the Reining Horse Foundation. Spearheaded by Marshall Kyle of Kyle Tack, with support from NRHA Professionals, this fundraiser is a popular way to support a good cause. The friendly competition took place during the 6666 NRHA Derby presented by Markel.

NRHA Corporate Partner Platinum Performance again proved a gracious host, providing a slot on the packed Derby schedule for Reiners Rope following the welcome party and non pro draw. This year, the roping was structured as a random draw, meaning headers and heelers had no choice in with whom they were paired to rope. After two rounds, 17 teams advanced to the finals to determine placings. Prizes were contributed from several supporters, with all entry fees and donations going to RHF. The roping was established in 2019 by NRHA Professionals Billy Williams and Patrick Flaherty.

“Reiners Rope is important for two reasons: We raise money for the RHF, and it’s a fun event for kids and adults to enjoy away from the horses,” said Jordan Larson, chair of the NRHA Professionals Committee. “We always have a great time, and Marshall Kyle deserves a lot of credit for putting it on.”

The overall winners were Owen Deary and Pake Bell. In second place were Spence Bell and



First place went to Owen Deary and Pake Bell. (Left to Right: Marshall Kyle, Patrick Flaherty, Pake Bell, Owen Deary, and Jordan Larson)



For the last few years, NRHA Professionals and non pros and youth riders have come together at the 6666 NRHA Derby Presented by Markel to have some fun roping the dummy while raising money for the Reining Horse Foundation.

Pake Bell. The roping raised \$1,710 for the RHF’s Dale Wilkinson Memorial Crisis Fund, which benefits reiners enduring major medical, accident and disaster situations. To make a contribution, visit reiningfoundation.com/donate. ■

IN THE KNOW

BE SURE YOU'RE PREPARED FOR THE UPDATED NRHA ANIMAL WELFARE AND MEDICATIONS POLICY.

ARTICLE COMPILED BY NRHA STAFF

What are the updates to the policy?

The updated policy assesses increased penalties, including fines, suspension, disqualification and publication of offender names in ReinerSuite. The medications report form will also require additional signatures. Here is a brief summary of other major updates to the policy and reporting procedure:

- Romifidine will be permitted to be administered in accordance with the NRHA Animal Welfare and Medications Policy. This must be declared on a properly submitted complete medications report form.
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) “stacking” — combining more than one — is no longer permitted.
- Disciplinary procedures are in place for those who refuse testing and/or demonstrate unsportsmanlike conduct during the process.
- The medications testing fee is increasing from \$7 to \$10 for all approved events to adjust for inflation and to allow for additional testing.
- All testing has already switched to plasma for a quicker turnaround time.

For events held in Europe, please refer to the full policy with exceptions, including the romifidine allowance.

Who is considered the responsible party?

The rider is considered the person responsible and to whom the penalties will be assessed. As the rider, it is your responsibility to know which medications the horse you show has received, both topically and internally.

How are horses selected for testing?

The testing team randomly selects the horses, typically based on draw or “horses on the dirt” numbers. However, at some events, there are

All NRHA competitors are responsible for reading the NRHA Handbook and the entire updated NRHA Animal Welfare Policy prior to showing in an NRHA-approved event.

predetermined requirements for who will automatically be tested, such as class champions.

What happens if I have been randomly selected for testing?

A testing technician will greet you upon exiting the arena and will introduce themselves as part of the NRHA testing team. They will walk with you back to your stall and stay with you while you untack your horse. They will ask you questions regarding the horse and will ask you to review the sample collection card to verify the information is correct. If they are not already there, the veterinarian will then come and collect two plasma samples. Once sample A and sample B are sealed, the testing team will ask you to sign off that you have reviewed the process from start to finish. At this point, the collection process is complete.

What is a probationary period?

Medications probationary periods are tracked by member. The timeframe of the probation begins with the first violation and ends according to the type of violation. If the member commits another violation in that timeframe, they will receive a stronger penalty.

Who should I contact if I have a question about the administration of a medication prior to competition?

You should always consult with your local veterinarian, and refer to the policy and *NRHA Handbook* to ensure compliance.

For more information and to read the updated policy in its entirety, visit nrha.com/welfare. ■

NRHA Event Calendar

Please visit nrha.com and ReinerSuite™ for the most updated information.

July 1

First Sire & Dam Futurity payment due

July 10–15

NRHA European Affiliate Championships

Givrins, Switzerland

For more information, visit nrhaeac.com.

August 1

Fourth NRHA Futurity payment due

August 6–13

NRHA Oceania Affiliate Championships

Tamworth, Australia

For more information, visit facebook.com/oceanianrha.

August 18

RHF Raise A Million

Las Vegas, NV

A live auction featuring a limited selection of items will be held at The Run For A Million to benefit the reining community. Donor opportunities are open. Email Leslie Baker atl baker@nrha.com for more information.

September 1–15

Electronic Voting Open

Voting for one Executive Committee member and North American regional directors (one seat each for Northwest and South Central). For more information, contact Christa Morris-Stone at cmorris@nrha.com.

September 11

NRHA Markel Futurity Sales consignment deadline

For more information, visit nrha.com/sales or email sales@nrha.com.

September 21

Online steward recertification

Pre-registration is required. For more information, contact Patti Carter at pcarter@nrha.com.

October 1

Final NRHA Futurity payment due

Final Sire & Dam Futurity payment due

NRHA Futurity rider designations due
Riders and divisions may be changed through close of business November 1 with no penalty.

October 12

Online steward recertification

Pre-registration is required. For more information, contact Patti Carter at pcarter@nrha.com.

October 15–17

Judge applicant seminar & school

Kreuth, Germany

or more information, contact Nadine Elsner at info@nrha.de.

October 20

Deadline for new NRHA Futurity sponsors

For more information, contact Christy Landwehr at clandwehr@nrha.com.

November 1–5

NRHA European Derby

Lyon, France

For more information, visit nrhaeuropeanderby.com.

November 3–5

Judges' School

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Pre-registration is required. For more information, contact Patti Carter at pcarter@nrha.com.

November 5

NRHA Futurity stall reservations due

November 23–December 3

NRHA Futurity & Adequan® North American Affiliate Championships

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

For more information, visit nrhafuturity.com.

November 30

NRHA Markel Futurity Sales

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

For more information, visit nrha.com/sales or email sales@nrha.com.

Affiliate Regional Championships

Tentative and subject to change.

East Central

August 17–20

Murfreesboro, TN

South Central

August 25–September 3

Tulsa, OK

Eastern Canada

August 30–September 3

Bécancour, Québec, CN

Southeast

August 31–September 3

Jacksonville, FL

Northeast

September 7–10

Logan Township, NJ

Western Canada

September 7–10

Red Deer, Alberta, CN

Northwest

September 30–Oct. 7

Nampa, ID

Southwest

October 5–8

Scottsdale, AZ

North Central

October 12–15

Lincoln, NE

Mexico

TBD

NRHA

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One-Day Super Sale!

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MARKEL® NOVEMBER 30, 2023



CONSIGNMENTS DUE SEPTEMBER 11, 2023

Visit nrha.com/sales or contact Angie Honeywell at sales@nrha.com or (405)946-7400 x 123

LEGAL ACTION

INSIGHTS TO KEEP YOUR BUSINESS SAFE

Defamation or Opinion?

AS THE REINING INDUSTRY GROWS AND EXPANDS INTO NEW TERRITORY, YOU MIGHT FIND YOURSELF THE SUBJECT OF RUMORS AND NEGATIVE REMARKS. WHEN DO YOU HAVE A CASE FOR DEFAMATION, AND WHEN SHOULD YOU JUST RIDE IT OUT?

BY KRISTIN PITZER

Participate in a competitive environment long enough, and it's quite likely that at some point in time, you'll hear your name mentioned in a negative light. This is true even in the horse world, thanks to horse-show gossip, social media, and the ability of anybody to post online reviews about anything.

Whether your name becomes involved in negative talk because a customer misunderstood expectations, a video of your riding was taken out of context, or the sale of a horse went awry, you might be tempted to strike back with a slander or libel court case. But it's challenging to prove defamation, said Jordan Willette, an attorney and reiner based in Phoenix and San Francisco. As the onus is on the person who feels they're defamed to prove it, these cases are often tricky and not always clearcut.

What Is Defamation?

When people hear or see someone making unpleasant statements about them publicly, they often jump to threatening to sue for libel (written) or slander (spoken). However, certain elements must be in place for a defamation lawsuit to happen, Willette said. For one, the



When someone disparages your business, you might be quick to think you can take legal action against them. Arm yourself with facts about defamation and slander before jumping into a legal battle.

person must be making a statement of fact, not opinion, and the statement must be false and told or published to a third party. Separating a statement of opinion from a fact can be one of the hardest parts of determining whether you have a case for defamation.

"Let's say it comes out that somebody is treating horses poorly," Willette said. "That can be an opinion based on somebody's individual definition because non-horse people, for instance, don't understand different horse-training techniques, or some people may just think the training method is not appropriate for the horse. At the end of the day, abuse, because of the strong nature of the language, isn't necessarily an opinion statement. It's going to be considered fact." →



A paper trail or a digital capture of communications between you and clients in your barn and those who buy horses from you can be your best asset if a situation requires litigation

From there, you must be able to prove damages to your business or reputation were caused by the untrue statement. Did you lose wages or future earning capacity due to the statement that was made? If all of those elements are in place, you may have a case against the speaker. If a single one is missing, it is not classified as defamation.

Just Because It's Unkind, Doesn't Mean It's Defamatory

The horse world is full of opinions about everything—training, blanketing, hoof care, etc. Because of that, it's highly likely that at some point, you'll run into a person who disagrees with how you operate. If things escalate and they post their opinions about your practices publicly, you might wish to retaliate; however, because statements of opinion are not defamatory, you won't have much of a leg to stand on.

This applies whether the person making the statements is a stranger or someone with whom you have a business relationship. For example,

if a former client, due to a misunderstanding, feels they were wronged and blasts you on social media, you might think a defamatory lawsuit is in order. However, unless what they're posting is blatantly false and presented as a fact about your business, the customer is legally entitled to their personal viewpoint.

"In a client-misunderstanding situation, it may be their opinion they are telling people, which can be a little bit of an issue," Willette said. "If what they're saying is an outright lie, having agreements and conversations in writing will protect you in the long run.

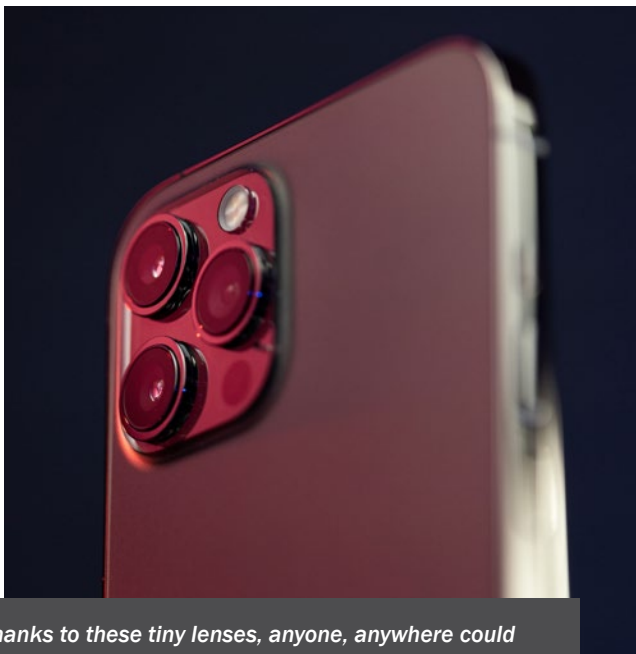
"If you suffer any damages, like customers are leaving or you're not receiving more training inquiries, then there might be legal action," Willette continued. "By having agreements and conversations in writing, it helps support a case of defamation by proving it was a false statement. Still, these types of cases are very hard to win in a legal proceeding."

Whether it's a quick text, an email, or a formal letter, always follow up client conversations with a summary in writing. That way, if a relationship does deteriorate, you'll have a paper trail to protect you.

Set Yourself Up for Success

If someone has a bad opinion of you, there's not much to stop them from talking about it. The best thing you can do to protect yourself is to avoid situations that cast you in a negative light in the first place and always conduct yourself professionally.

"Any time you're in public, you need to realize that somebody may have a camera and could video what you're doing," Willette said. "You have to put your best foot forward when you're in public situations, such as at horse shows. Realize it's not necessarily the horse people you have to worry about; sometimes, it's the non-horse



Thanks to these tiny lenses, anyone, anywhere could potentially film or photograph your horse activities. Manage your reputation by being aware of how you present yourself and your horses.

people who don't always understand what they're looking at and what you're doing."

Transparency goes a long way in protecting your reputation. If you're selling a horse, for instance, be as open as possible with potential buyers. One way to do that is by suggesting they drug test the horse during the prepurchase exam. That way, if the sale goes wrong after the new owner brings the horse home, you can point back to those records.

"Recommend [a drug test] and then have it on a disclaimer, such as the sales contract," Willette said. "If someone buys a horse that goes lame shortly after the sale is completed and the new owner had the prepurchase done, the vet will have evaluated the horse and said there were no present injuries. This makes it easier to prove truth versus opinion. So, if people are saying you sold a bad horse, that's false, and you can prove that it's false."

Though it's often hard to prove, defamation is generally a black or white situation, Willette said. Unless specific criteria are met, you won't have a solid case against someone simply because they're speaking negatively about you. The best way to avoid becoming the subject of unfounded

rumormongering and negative talk is to let your good character speak for itself in all of your business actions and to summarize conversations and understandings with clients and potential clients in writing.

"We're all going to have this happen to us at some point, especially in the horse world where everyone has a different opinion," Willette says. "Just remember that you have to be careful what type of training you're doing when you're at a horse show and mind your reputation. Nobody thinks it is going to happen to them, but in case it does, you don't want to find yourself up a creek without a paddle." ■

This article is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute individualized legal advice. Contract-drafting and business disputes can be very complex. When questions arise based on specific situations, please seek a knowledgeable attorney for advice.

Meet the Expert

Jordan Willette, an attorney at Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani, LLP, focuses her practice in civil litigation, including equine law, products liability, and business disputes. She graduated

in 2017 from the Sandra Day O'Connor School of Law at Arizona State University, where she was

named a Trial Advocacy Fellow and served as a judicial extern at the Arizona Court of Appeals, Division One. When she's not in the court room, Willette enjoys riding and is the fundraising chairman for Horses Help, a therapeutic riding organization for children with disabilities. A reiner for 16 years, Willette still owns her youth horse, Whizin In The Dirt.



ENGAGEMENT

ADVICE FOR THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Build a Better Team

YOU'VE HIRED THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO SUPPORT YOUR BUSINESS. NOW, WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP THEM WORK TOGETHER TO THEIR FULL POTENTIAL WHILE ALSO ENJOYING THEIR JOB IN YOUR BARN?

BY JENNIFER PAULSON

Team-building activities might seem like they only belong in corporate careers, but they're also essential for small businesses. No, you don't have to foot the bill for a four-day retreat at a spa; however, you can put together fun activities that'll engage your employees, help them feel valued, and encourage them to work together.

Idea 1: Host a Watch Party

Whether it's a horse-related event or a big game, gather your team and their families, if appropriate, to enjoy taking in the broadcast together. Up the ante by setting up task-based betting. For example, whomever predicts the first person to score, can assign one of their daily tasks to another employee. Encourage everyone to bring and share food, and take halftime or another break to express your appreciation to your team. It's virtually no cost to you, other than the time to plan.

Idea 2: Support Their Interests

If your assistants and barn help participate in extracurricular activities together—perhaps a recreational softball team or they team rope on the side or maybe they play in a band—find a way to support their hobbies. You could sponsor their team or an event where they'll compete, or you could simply show up to support their efforts. They're on call for you when you need them at a show; demonstrating your support makes helping you a more reciprocal effort. Get the whole barn on board to go along with you!

Idea 3: Call Regular Meetings

Pick one morning a week to have a huddle with your team. Get bonus points for providing donuts or breakfast burritos! During your meeting, announce victories in and out of the arena, go over any concerns, point out opportunities for growth, and allow your team members to speak up, too.

Idea 4: Foster One-on-One Chats

Every once in a while, make an effort to take one team member to lunch to give them a chance to discuss their needs, conflicts with other employees, goals they want to work toward, and ideas they have for your business. The key to success for this is to be completely above board with all employees that the face time is available to everyone. One way to make it available to all is to pick one employee each month and cycle through all of them, repeating the order once everyone has had a chance to bend your ear.

Idea 5: Plan a Team Outing

Take your employees to a local event—minor-league sports are fairly affordable to attend and are a great way to support your community. Getting away from the barn can open new conversations and build relationships in a non-horse-centric venue. ■

Resources

Team Building for Small Businesses;

teambuildinghub.com

15 Small-Business Team-Building Activities;

constantcontact.com

17 Best Team-Building Ideas for Small

Businesses; teambuilding.com

DOLLARS & SENSE

Delegate to Do More

When you own your own business, it's easy to get bogged down in trying to do everything yourself and believing that only you can do all the tasks the "right way." But that's not a way to maintain your passion, let alone your sanity. Delegation is required to get more done. But how?

Do what you do best. Keep things on your plate that you excel at—and enjoy or find gratifying. Ask yourself, what do you enjoy doing most in your day-to-day? What's the best use of

your time? What do you do better than anyone else? Go through each daily task, and add those that check all three boxes to your own list of to-dos.

Assign what they do best. Just as you considered your own strengths and skills, do the same for your employees. Figure out what they do best, what they like doing, and then assign related tasks.

Give specific instructions. When assigning a task, give your help very detailed instructions concerning how you want the job done, what success looks like, and any pitfalls to keep in mind. When you're all on the same page,



Delegating tasks allows you to focus on what you do best and encourages your team to work together.

it sets everyone up for success and keeps you from succumbing to the next point on the list.

Don't micromanage. Offering guidance is one thing. Following around your employee and telling them everything they're doing wrong is another. Not only will this strain your relationship with your employee, it eats into your time to do your own tasks.

Accept that not all tasks will be your favorite. We all have parts of our jobs that we don't like. When deciding what chores to keep and which to delegate, think about spreading out the least liked tasks around the entire team, so no one feels extra put-upon. ■

Annual AHC Meeting Update

At the annual American Horse Council meeting in Denver this spring, the Shows and Competitions Committee gathered to discuss the state of the competitive side of the equine industry. Committee Chair and incoming NRHA Commissioner Billy Smith noted that the business faces positive growth and many opportunities, but along with that come threats on the horizon. Here are a few updates from that session.

- **PAST (Preventing All Soring Tactics) Act:** This doesn't directly affect reiners, but its influence will be felt throughout the industry. AHC continues to educate freshmen senators about this initiative to gain support and keeps moving the issue forward.
- **Various Rodeo Bans/Circus Act Bans:** Support from AHC has slowed or stopped action to ban rodeo or rodeo-related activities in California and Quebec. Additionally, work is being done to add exceptions for rodeos, horse shows, and county fairs into various "circus act bans" across the country.
- **Amateur Rule Changes:** AQHA and APHA recently conducted a survey to consider allowing amateur riders to give lessons, which would offer more horse opportunities for youth riders. This consideration continues in the group. NRHA already has two programs in place that allow non pro and youth riders to work for NRHA Professionals. Read about them beginning on page 14.
- **Unsanctioned Events:** AHC approached the USDA with concerns about unsanctioned



A M E R I C A N
H O R S E C O U N C I L

Each year, the American Horse Council gathers to discuss issues core to the future of the horse industry.

races and horse activities, such as pop-up events. The concern is that unsanctioned events don't exercise diligent biosecurity measures, which put the entire community of horses at risk. Additionally, they often come with ties to cartels, drugs, guns, and violence. AHC has asked USDA to consider an action plan to manage these events.

Additionally, AHC invites you to take the 2023 AHC Economic Impact Study, which demonstrates the value of the equine industry and its contributions to the overall economy. Take the survey [here](#), and encourage your customers to do the same. The survey is open through September 29. ■

Summer Marketing Thought-Starters

On the heels of one of the biggest events in your sport—the 6666 NRHA Derby Presented by Markel—comes one that gains steam and visibility every year: The Run for a Million. Here are ways to market your business during this high-profile event.

Share. One easy way to capitalize on the event is to share posts from all corners of the internet that discuss the event. From the official account itself to your sponsors' posts to pros competing in the big event, latch onto their content and share away. Consider sharing to your stories instead of your timeline or grid, due to the timely nature of the event.

Create. Develop your own content about the event. If you're attending as a spectator, give your perspective on the happenings in Vegas. If you have customers competing or you're showing in the Shootout, offer your behind-the-scenes take. You don't have to be riding in the main event to share your experience.

Serve. Use your visibility to share PSAs from Vegas and to warn your fans about hack links to watch the event. Additionally, share posts about the Raise a Million auction that benefits the Reining Horse Foundation.

Enjoy. Show yourself being a fan. Be vulnerable and put yourself out there. When your community sees how you react to the excitement surrounding The Run for a Million, you become relatable and build strong bonds with potential customers. ■



There are three easy ways you can stay in communication with your association and your professionals' group.

Stay Connected

Are you connected with your NRHA Professionals peers and the association? Be sure you stay in touch with the following communication outlets so you don't miss any news, discussions, requests for input, and opportunities to volunteer.

JOIN THE FACEBOOK GROUP. It's super-easy to join. Get on Facebook, and search “NRHA Professionals” or click this [link](#). Request to join the group, and Sara Honegger will approve your entry if you have a current Professional membership. This group can be a terrific resource for many things. Post when you're looking to find shared lodging for help at a show, hiring new help, have questions for the group, and even to get access to the digital *NRHA Pro Trainer* each quarter.

JOIN THE TEXT LINE. Join the NRHA Professionals text line by clicking this [link](#). Here you'll get notifications of important meetings, information from the association, and receive a link to the digital *NRHA Pro Trainer* each quarter.

UPDATE YOUR PROFILE. Go to ReinerSuite™ and click on “Trainer Profile” to update your phone number, address, focus of your business, logo, accolades, and more to help new customers find you when they use the Find A Pro button to locate a professional. ■

The Apprentice:

Assistants will come with all levels of experience. For the most successful relationship, meet them where they are, and work together to set realistic expectations.



MAKE THE MOST OF THE EXPERIENCE

NRHA PROGRAMS CAN MAKE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN YOU AND HIRING HELP FOR YOUR TRAINING BUSINESS.

BY MEGAN ARSZMAN

It's no secret that it's become increasingly difficult to find dependable, knowledgeable help in the barn. Many NRHA Professionals struggle with a growing number of horses in training, but a dwindling number of assistants and help to keep the barn viable.

It's also no secret that there are many youth riders and non pros who, upon graduating from their youth careers, think about what it might be like to turn in their card and "go pro." However, the fear of not succeeding or not liking the other side of the industry scares them because of the wait to reapply for their non pro status. This leads many youths and non pros to forego their dreams because of uncertainty of their choice.

This situation opened the gate for programs that essentially allow the immersion of the youth and non pro into the NRHA Professional's world, allowing them to experience the work it takes in the barn before running through the in-gate in the open division—all without giving up the chance for an easy return to non pro status.

What Is the NRHA Apprentice Program?

The NRHA Apprentice Program is laid out in the 2023 NRHA Handbook, under "Show Rules and Regulations" Section B, Non Pro Membership Conditions.

(6) NRHA Apprentice Program:

(a) Non Pro Apprentice Exemption:

Apprentice status must be granted prior to a Non Pro applicant apprenticing with an NRHA Professional. Applicants must allow 45 days (minimum) for processing applications. Individuals who begin an apprenticeship prior to Apprentice status being granted are in violation of the Non Pro conditions and their Non Pro status will be in jeopardy. Failure to comply with the application requirements as specified in this Handbook may result in disciplinary action.

Non pros who are interested in participating in the Apprentice Program must keep in mind these rules:

- Applicants must be at least 18 years of age.
- Applicant must apprentice with NRHA Professionals and physically work at the facility.
- Apprentices can show only in Open division classes during the apprenticeship period. All previous NRHA non pro and open earnings (prior to the apprenticeship) will be used to determine the apprentice's class eligibility.

The apprenticeship period lasts for 12 consecutive months, from the time of approval from NRHA. At the end of those 12 months, the apprentice must decide: remain an open rider, thus foregoing their non pro status, or reapply for non pro status.

"The program is beneficial to the apprentice because they get a chance to see what horse training is all about, without losing their non pro status," says NRHA Professional and Two Million Dollar Rider Jordan Larson. "That's a big deal."

The idea behind the program is that the NRHA Professional gets somebody to help without a large financial commitment, and the apprentice gets an opportunity to experience what it's like to be an NRHA Professional. The apprentice

can then decide if that's the road they want to go down, and just maybe they can become an assistant trainer with the NRHA Professional they apprenticed under.

Is the Apprentice Program Right for Your Barn?

If you're willing to give the Apprentice Program a try in your barn, it's recommended to have some patience for the younger riders and realize that this is a big change from what they might be used to.

"I've had kids who didn't make it all the way through (the 12 months) because they got homesick," Larson shares. "That's probably one of the biggest obstacles (to the program), I think."

The program is an immersion to the long hours, heavy workload, and lonely nights when riders might miss their families or personal celebrations. It's a lot like college, only with the



Jessica Fritzler is a graduate of the NRHA Apprentice program and recommends that NRHA Professionals clearly outline duties and expectations for their help.

opportunity to ride multiple horses and get paid a little bit to do so.

“Ultimately, we’re giving them the chance to experience what it’s like to be in a training program,” Larson says. “It’s really important that the trainer is committed to the apprentice, and the apprentice is committed to the trainer for those 12 months.”

From the experience of NRHA Professionals, apprentices can easily be put in one of two groups: ones with experience like an incoming assistant trainer, and those without that experience.

“Different programs call for different requirements and permissions,” Larson advises. “Professionals with non pro and youth programs will have easier horses to handle for those with lesser experience than NRHA Professionals who deal solely in aged-event horses. We deal with so many different aspects in our industry that you have to realize that you need the right person to be in your barn. In my program, I have 2-year-old and 3-year-old stud colts that I would not want to have someone with no experience working with them because it can be dangerous.”

Tips for Taking on an Apprentice

As all NRHA Professionals know, it takes a lot of talent, energy, and desire to make it in this business. It’s gotten so competitive anymore that to be successful, you’re working crazy hours at home and at the horse show. It’s not for everybody. This program allows non pros to experience all of that without losing their status.

In order to protect your business and your horses, you have to make sure you’re choosing the right apprentice for what you need and what they want to get out of the experience. Request for references from the applicant that you can contact and trust.



In 2022, NRHA approved allowing youth riders to become working assistants. It's a win-win for pros and kids, because you gain experienced help, and they get to see what it's really like to work in a professional training barn.

If the applicant isn’t a non pro who you’re familiar with, what is their experience in the show ring and the saddle? Don’t be stuck on the idea that the applicant must have experience only in reining and have a commendable record. While reining experience is ideal, many riders are branching into other events and disciplines, which could be beneficial for your training program.

“A lot of the apprentice applicants are someone we’ve met before at clinics and shows,” Larson says. “There are probably people out there in other horse sports that we aren’t reaching, but we should.”

Potential jobs for Apprentices can include (but not limited to):

- Tacking up and warming up horses
- Starting 2-year-olds
- Managing the packing for shows

SafeSport

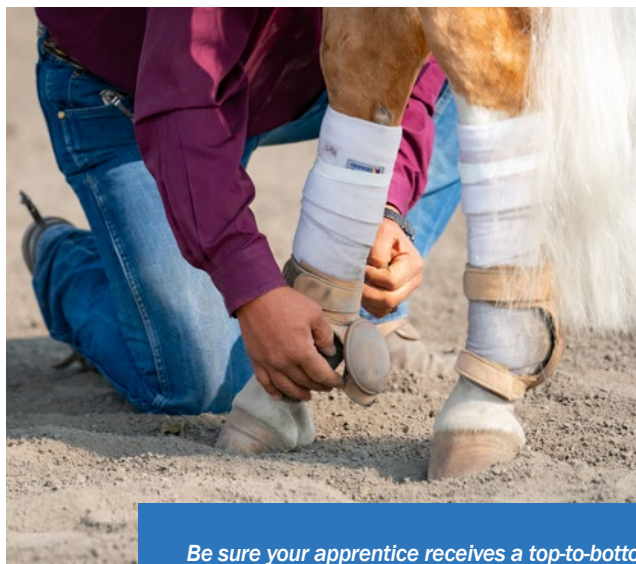
The Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017 was signed into law in February 2018 by the United States Congress. It is a governing act to ensure that athletes can report any allegations of abuse to an independent entity for investigation and resolution. This law is a means to protect younger athletes, including our reining athletes, from abuse.

The United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) instituted the SafeSport Program as a way to emphasize the responsibility equestrian professionals have to encourage the youth and keep them safe from any potential abuse. This program was created in 2017. The U.S. Center for SafeSport works with national bodies such as the National Reining Horse Association to enforce the SafeSport Code and Federal Safe Sport Act.

Some policies from the USEF SafeSport Program, which are applicable to all discipline and sport, include:

- One-on-one interactions with minors must be observable and interruptible, with exceptions requiring written consent from a legal guardian.
- Adults must include another adult on all electronic communications with a minor.
- An adult may travel with a minor in the presence of another adult, or two other minors, or with written consent from the minor's legal guardian.
- Working students under 18 years of age who travel or live with a trainer must also have written consent from the working student's legal guardian to do so.

To find out more about SafeSport and how it can be applied to working relationships with prospective apprentices, visit uscenterforsafesport.org.



Be sure your apprentice receives a top-to-bottom experience that aligns with their skills. They should expect to do some entry-level work, like preparing horses to ride, but also learn about your business practices and the ins and outs of owning your own operation.

- Handling horses for the farrier or vet
- Legging up horses to keep them in shape

Be cautious about frustrating your apprentice with menial tasks. Again, a lot depends on your program and the experience of the apprentice themselves, but you don't want to keep things too remedial for those 12 months, or it could cause a disgruntled apprentice who doesn't get the experience they needed to make the decision they're faced with.

"It's important that the NRHA Professionals understand that we're looking to grow and gain knowledge of what it's like to be a trainer," says Jessica Fritzler, an alumnus of the program. "We want to learn and be more involved in more things, whether it's learning about the thought process of getting horses ready for shows, communication with clients, etc. Yes, we will groom and do whatever needs to be done, but the purpose of the program is to help riders like me decide if being an NRHA Professional is what you want to do with your life."

Fritzler recommends that NRHA Professionals have a clear picture of the purpose of why they're bringing on an apprentice and to be willing to take extra time to communicate with their apprentices

what is expected of them, while also taking the time to teach.

Opportunities for Youths

The same year NRHA launched its apprentice program, they began offering opportunities for youth riders to work for NRHA Professionals. Before you dive into this information, please read the sidebar about SafeSport.

In 2022 the NRHA Non Pro Committee presented a way to relax the restrictions youth riders faced in the past to create a pathway for young riders who want to hone their horsemanship skills, plus offset the financial obstacles of showing or pursuing a career in training while learning more about the industry without sacrificing their Non Pro status. When youths reach the age of 19, they can make the decision to retain their Non Pro status and abide by the Non Pro conditions or become an NRHA Professional.

NRHA Non Pro Committee Chair Ginger Schmursal shared, “Horses and horse shows are expensive, which means that reining might not be an option for some youth. By relaxing these restrictions, we can welcome even more youth into the industry who want to ride or learn to ride without having to worry about losing their Non Pro status.”

Although this rule is new to the reining industry, it is common practice in other disciplines. For example, in the English industry, many people would not be where they are today if they had not had the opportunity to gain experience and knowledge as working students.

Any rider who is a current youth member of NRHA is eligible to reside with and/or work for any NRHA Professional in good standing. Remuneration can include housing and food. Youth riders are allowed to have their personal horse or horses with the trainer, and details of board and

Spreading the Word About the Apprenticeship Program

NRHA Professionals, including Jordan Larson and Ryan Rushing, are developing ways to scout talent and increase awareness for the Apprenticeship Program in hopes of growing the program and improving the benefits for both NRHA Professionals and apprentices. One idea of Rushing's includes hosting events similar to Rookie Days where pros host Apprentice Days. Potential applicants can come to an NRHA Professional's barn to see what being an apprentice can entail, ask questions, and find out if they're qualified to apply for the program.

“It could be like a scouting event, where the pro could then recommend the applicant to other NRHA Professionals who would fit them best,” Larson says. This could then open the door to more talent, while helping to weed out the interested parties who might not be ready for the work involved.

training shall be decided between those parties.

Youth riders are allowed to ride any horses both at home and at horse shows while working for the trainer. Youth riders are allowed to compete in the youth and non pro based on current NRHA ownership rules. In classes that do not have ownership restrictions (Rookie 1 & 2, Green Reiner 1 & 2, Youth Rookie, Unrestricted Youth, and all open classes, except Rookie Professional), youth riders may compete on any horse regardless of ownership.

Learn more [here](#).

Say It: 'You're Hired'

So, is the NRHA Apprentice Program or hiring a youth rider a good fit for your barn and your training style? It all depends on what you're looking to accomplish. But it never hurts to give the program a try. It not only provides extra help in the barn, but also enriches the education for the non pro and youth rider about the world of reining. ■



It's easy to ask fellow trainers what they do to keep customers happy, but sometimes you get the best intel from the customers themselves. Here, four non pros share what keeps them happy.

NON PRO POV

WE TALKED TO FOUR NON PRO RIDERS AND OWNERS AT VARIOUS LEVELS TO LEARN WHAT THEY LOVE ABOUT THE PROFESSIONALS THEY TRAIN WITH, PLUS WHAT FACTORS THEY CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A BARN.

BY KAYCIE TIMM

Your business relies on your customers, so customer service is Job 1. While it's great to get insights on what other pros do to keep customers happy, we talked to several non pros and owners who shared their perspective on what separates the good from the great in terms of customer service, business management, and more. Use these strategies to grow your business and keep your clientele—and their horses—happy.

A Solid Foundation

After nearly 20 years showing reiners, Julie Boer of Wickenburg, Arizona, knows what she wants from a professional. Her current trainer, Yonathan Baruch, has earned her loyalty through several traits, including one Boer considers key.

"I appreciate his ability to problem-solve," Boer

shares. "He's always open to looking at other ways of taking care of horses, taking care of us, and taking care of tack."

Dana Wetherell, a non pro rider from Purcell, Oklahoma, relies on Trevor Dare to keep both her non pro horse and her open horses in performance shape.

"Trust is the biggest factor," Wetherell reveals. "I never have to worry if my horse is getting worked and cared for. We're paying our trainer to do a job, and he's the only one who can tell me if my horse is on track."

With a busy schedule outside of reining, Wetherell defers to Dare's expertise to make sure her horses are competition-ready.

"Most non pros have a job," Wetherell explains. "We don't have time to see if our trainer is doing



Dana Wetherell has both her own non pro horses in training with NRHA Professional Trevor Dare, as well as her open horses.

his job. Pros need to make sure that their whole barn runs smoothly when the client isn't there."

Running a Tight Ship

Non pro rider Jessica Zaharia of Amarillo, Texas, maintains her reining horses with the help of NRHA Professional Heather Thompson.

"I'm able to get lessons at flexible times, which is huge for a non pro," Zaharia reveals. "Most of us work during the day, so for a trainer to offer lessons in the evenings or on the weekends is key. If I want to come and ride at 8:00 p.m., Heather's cool with that. The facility is open for my use, which I appreciate because my schedule can get crazy."

With flexibility comes the need for solid scheduling, and non pros like Boer find comfort knowing their trainer is organized.

"Yonathan always keeps track of my schedule and when I'll ride," Boer says. "The arena is never overly crowded. When you're out there, it's your time."

The same applies to new riders who might join the barn's roster.

"[Baruch] always makes time for new clients alongside his standing ones," Boer revealed. "That makes people feel wanted in a way that's professional, but also very personal."

A Winning Environment

Lindsay Handren, a non pro rider from California, describes herself as a "lifelong customer." So, when she's choosing an NRHA Professional, she's looking for a perfect fit in more than just the training program.

"My trainers become like family to me, and all the barn members do, too," Handren shares.

Currently, her horses are in training at Katona Reining Horses in Michigan, while Handren now lives in California. Her first impression at Katona made her confident she'd made the right choice.

"Everybody looks happy and like they are actually friends who got along and supported each other," Handren recalls. "That's really important for me, because I like a barn with a good sense of community."

Tim and Cindy Katona focus on coaching youth and non pros, helping horses and riders build a solid foundation. The barn's tight-knit atmosphere encourages newer riders to find their place.

"During the shows, everybody helps and supports each other," Handren says. "If somebody is draw one at a 7:00 a.m. class, the group is still there getting up early to go cheer for them."

When Wetherell was first introduced to Dare's barn, she worried she wouldn't find the low-stress environment she sought.

"I wanted to have something relaxing that I could enjoy," she admits. "I like to win, but it's also a hobby, so I didn't want a lot of pressure."

She found Dare's facility perfectly suited her.

"The main thing, in addition to the pro themselves, is the atmosphere of the barn," Wetherell observes. "People fit into a certain type of barn. Almost all the non pros at Trevor's barn

own a horse that they have in training in addition to their non pro horse. It's a unique group of people, because we all have our horse that we want to enjoy and another horse that we're hoping will be competitive in the open."

The Right Team

It takes a team to craft a successful program, but a solid staff includes more than just equine expertise. A barn filled with friendly employees makes for a better overall experience.

"When you go to ride, your horse is saddled and ready, so there's no waiting," Wetherell says of Dare's facility. "You get undivided attention for your lesson. When your lesson is done, you get off, you hand your horse to one of the employees, and they take care of the horse from there."

Like Wetherell, Boer appreciates that her pro has a staff she can rely on.

"Everybody's friendly, and I'm extremely well-taken-care-of when I'm there," Boer explains. "They welcome me to help if I want to, but they're willing to do everything for me. It's fun to be treated like a princess."

A solid team is not only helpful, but also efficient and competent.

"The team is pretty amazing," Boer reveals. "They're always looking out for the horses and non pros. Everyone, from the grooms and stall cleaners all the way up, make a difference. It makes the environment better for everybody."

That care doesn't stop when the non pro leaves the barn, either, giving owners peace of mind that their horses get the best care 24/7.

"There are so many eyes on those horses every day," Wetherell comments. "I don't ever question if they're being cared for because he has the staff to do it."

The Extra Mile

Taking care of clients and their horses outside



Lindsay Handren has a big commute to ride—from California to Michigan—so she appreciates great communication and trust in her NRHA Professionals.

of training services and lessons can make an impact, too.

"She's committed," Zaharia says of Thompson. "If there's something a horse needs, whether it be supplements or an increase in feed or even a bath, I know it'll get done."

Some clients appreciate a pro who handles everything from vet trips to routine farrier care, while others like to step in and help.

"It's important to meet clients where they are," Zaharia explains. "I like to take my own horses to the vet, but that's just my ownership style. Other non pros prefer to have their trainer handle those things."

Communicating the timing for those services helps, as well.

"It's important to let everybody know what they're doing, when" Handren says. "Tim and Cindy [Katona] can facilitate a schedule with the vet and the farrier so clients don't have to worry about doing that on their own, which is nice for people like me who've never had a horse at their own property." →



Jessica Zaharia appreciates a pro with flexibility for her schedule, allowing her to schedule lessons and general riding time when it works best for her.

Payment Processes

Maintaining a facility with that level of care comes at a cost. Non pros and owners alike appreciate transparency and understanding where billing is concerned.

“Everybody’s different as far as backgrounds and finances,” Handren says. “I like a trainer who’s understanding of clients. They treat everybody the same, regardless of who might be the most financially well off in the barn. We’re all riders. We’re all horse people and showmen when we’re out there with our horses.”

For some, a monthly system with itemized expenses works best, while others line out costs annually so their clients can map out an entire year. Either way, transparency is key.

“We have an annual contract, so we know what everything is going to cost,” Wetherell reveals. “I’ve never had any surprises, which is huge because it’s not cheap.”

Zaharia notes that cost transparency applies to potential clients, too, so they’re prepared for the cost before they bring a horse into the barn.

Communication Keys

From routine care to show prep and everything in between, one common thread holds it all together: communication.

“Communication is key,” Wetherell states.

“It sounds simple, but you build trust with communication.”

“There’s always open communication between all of us in the barn,” Boer agrees. “It makes a big difference if you feel like communication goes both ways and everybody’s open.”

Both Zaharia and Handren love receiving regular text updates from their respective professionals—and videos never hurt, either. Maintaining consistent communication makes it easier to handle difficult situations, too. For example, Handren feels that the Katonas’ communication skills prevent potentially volatile situations from developing under the stressful environment of a show barn.

“They’re open to questions or concerns without getting defensive,” Handren reveals. “When you get on the defensive, you’re not actually hearing what the client is saying. Instead, they will listen to the client and try to understand where they’re coming from.”

“If a rider has a bad day or completely loses confidence, they give perspective and acknowledge the good stuff rather than focusing on the bad,” she continues.

Many non pros can be their own worst critic, so balancing criticism by shifting focus to even minor improvements can help.

“It’s competitive,” Handren explains. “We all want to do our best. If things don’t go the way that we hope they do, we’re hard on ourselves. Having a trainer who acknowledges the things that went right—and things you can work on—helps build confidence.”

Wetherell benefits from a similar balance of criticism and praise with her pro, too.

“Trevor is low-pressure,” Wetherell notes. “He can get you ready for Level 4, but he also makes lessons fun. There’s a good balance between what you’ve done correctly and what needs work.”

When it comes to making a tough call on a horse who isn’t progressing as expected, Wetherell appreciates a pro who doesn’t sugar-coat the facts.

“We’ve had a couple horses that we’ve taken out of training because they weren’t meeting the goals,” Wetherell explains. “Trevor’s very upfront. He’s never led us to believe we had something more than we did.”

That honesty allows the client to make an informed decision about next steps without wasting time or resources, which benefits both the client and their professional.

“Heather is very direct, which helps with those tougher conversations,” Zaharia notes. “She’s going to tell you if your horse isn’t performing well. She puts a positive spin on it by offering opportunities to figure out what the next move should be, then she supports you in the direction you need to go.”

Making It Fun

Horse-showing is stressful, so infusing the barn with a healthy dose of fun helps retain hobbyist non pros. Shortly after Handren moved her horses to Michigan, she got a feel for the Katonas’ ability to have fun.

“They hosted a big play day with everybody just enjoying their time on their horses, playing games, having a potluck,” Handren recalls. “It was a good environment that helped build team morale.”

Maintaining that atmosphere is especially important when a new rider joins the barn. Zaharia’s trainer often orchestrates introductions by asking current non pros to come out when the new rider has a lesson.

“Heather initiates situations where we can talk to them about showing, their horse, and how

they’re doing to get that support system going,” she shares. “The camaraderie and team aspect works well if you initiate it right from the get-go.”

Another way to keep it fun is to channel team spirit across your clientele.

“Having barn merch gives you that camaraderie,” Handren shares. “It doesn’t have to be anything extravagant, but hats, t-shirts, or sweatshirts help boost barn morale. Knowing you’re part of something can go a long way.”

“We all get swag,” Boer agrees. “I think it makes a difference in making it feel like you have a team rather than all the clients feeling separate. If everybody’s got the same jacket on and you feel like you’re part of a group, that can help build camaraderie.”

The Final Touch

Even with the best facility, staff, and procedures, at the end of the day, solid training makes all the difference. Taking time to tailor training to each individual non pro and horse can take a program to the next level.

“I like trainers to focus on what that particular horse-and-rider team is good at and play to their strengths,” Handren shares. “They’re not just sending everyone out there to go run and stop hard. They’re very individualized as far as the horse-and-rider combo and the game plan when you’re going into the arena.”

The first step is simply recognizing each duo’s strengths and weaknesses. Then, factoring that assessment into the training program not only improves the result but ultimately leads to happier clients, which in turn grows the sport of reining—and keeps horses in your barn.

“If we want to keep people in the sport, you have to figure out what’s best for each individual horse and person,” Zaharia concludes. “Tailoring the program to the horses and riders and being open about those goals is huge.” ■

NRHA Professional Code of Ethics

We, the members of the National Reining Horse Association Professionals, in carrying out our role of providing service to the reining horse industry, recognize the need to do so in a professional manner, and to represent the sport of reining in a professional manner with the highest degree of integrity.

Therefore, we have set forth the following code of ethics, which shall govern our endeavors in the industry. By signing this application, I agree to be bound by the rules of the NRHA Professional Code of Ethics. To participate in this program, I concede to maintaining a continuous individual membership with NRHA.

As a member of the NRHA Professionals, I will:

- Adhere to the professional standards of the NRHA and work to further its goals and objectives.
- Ensure that the welfare of the reining horse is paramount and that every horse shall always be treated humanely and with dignity, respect, and compassion, regardless if the horse does not reside under my direct supervision.
- Positively influence all members to refrain from any perceived misconduct or inappropriate actions towards either horses or other members.
- Conduct my affairs in the sport of reining with integrity, sincerity, and accuracy in an honest, transparent, and forthright manner.
- Act with integrity in my dealings with reining clients, other NRHA members, and the public when representing the sport of reining. In this regard, any horse shown by my spouse, client, or child will be economically owned as prescribed by applicable NRHA rules.
- Handle my reining horse business, operations, and communications (including those through social media) in a manner, which promotes a positive image of the reining horse industry.

- To fully disclose to customers the actual sales price and commissions involved in the sale or purchase of a horse.
- To not charge or receive a monetary commission, or other remuneration constituting a commission, from both buyer and seller of a horse.
- Model the proper ideals of positive sportsmanship and fair competition, and show cordial courtesy to fellow competitors, members, and Judges.

The Professional Code of Ethics is intended as a general guideline for reining professionals' behavior and is not intended to be an exhaustive list of conduct for NRHA Professionals. NRHA Professionals' conduct is also governed by NRHA Rules. This Code is intended, however, to state basic standards, which should govern the conduct of all professionals and to provide guidance to assist professionals in establishing and maintaining high standards of conduct within the reining horse industry.

This Code of Ethics generally identifies the ethical obligations of NRHA Professionals and does not substitute for, nor is it intended to substitute for, or in any way alter or modify the NRHA rules.

The members of the NRHA Professionals Committee created the NRHA Professional Code of Ethics to further promote the humane treatment of reining horses and ethical business practices. If you have questions regarding this code, please reach out to Sara Honegger at pcarter@nrha.com.

